

STORY

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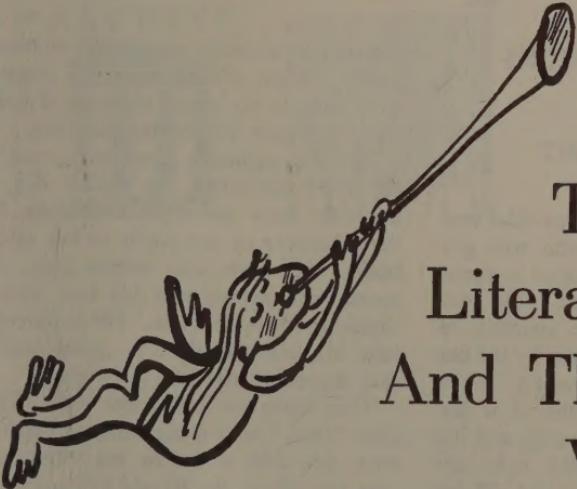
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The Literary Life And The Hell With It

by
WHIT BURNETT

about which the Herald Angels will be singing come January
is a book for all writers
would-be writers
readers
and people generally tired
of it all

"It combines," says Lewis Gannett, "the best of
Mark Twain, Walter Winchell & Gertrude Stein."

Many pictures by Ludwig Bemelmans

A STORY PRESS BOOK \$2.50
432 4th Avenue, N. Y.

Published (in January) by Harper & Bros.

END



PAGES

BEHIND THE BOOKS

by

LEWIS GANNETT

ELECTION night you knew who won. At least you knew who was governor. The other returns trickled in during the first post-election week. By mid-November it was all over, counted, recounted, checked, and assessed by the best political minds in the country. You knew just how many tenths of a percent the Gallup poll was wrong, and just what Mark Sullivan on the right and Jay Franklin on the left and Walter Lippman on his middle mountain-top thought of it all. You knew what to think; you could discuss Trends at any dinner table or any bar, succinctly and authoritatively.

In literature we haven't any Board of Elections to check the count. You're never quite sure who won, and whether it meant anything anyway. The publishers sometimes give out pretty figures about their best sellers; but the publishers seem to have grave suspicions of each other's figures, and some of the authors whisper that the royalty checks don't always jibe with the ads. About the next-best sellers and the worst sellers the publishers seldom give out any figures at all. Occasionally Simon and Schuster, who have a sense of humor and enough successes to make it all right, offer statistical confessions of their worst flops;

occasionally someone else timidly imitates them. When it's all over, of course; when there is no longer any hope of buffaloing anyone into buying the book.

When a publisher does make such a sad little confession, he usually ties it up with some sad little reflections on the reluctance of the public to buy good books. He never uses reverse logic, of course, or suggests that his best sellers should not have sold best. He just weeps into his beer about those good books that slipped quietly into the night.

Then there are best seller lists. The *New York Times* every Monday reports what fifty-odd stores in ten cities say they are selling; the *Herald Tribune* each Sunday charts the reports of seventy stores in fifty cities; the *Publisher's Weekly* tells what the jobbers, the middlemen of the industry, report. They all say about the same; and what they say is a fair, though not absolute, indication of relative sales. Some stores don't know what they sell.

"Time for that best seller report, Mabel," says Irene. "What'll we put down?" Like as not, Mabel answers, "Well, all the New York stores are selling that Scribner novel and that long story Macmillan's pushing; and we seem to have overstocked on that Whozis book, so we'd better put that down to give it a boost, and let's see, what else?" I've known stores to put a well-advertised book down on their best seller lists before it was even released for sale; they knew the trend of the market.

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